

VZCZCXR05168

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JUSTICE FOR T. MARCH BELL

DHS FOR OIA

HHS FOR PEDRO MORENO

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SMIG KCRM KWMN PREL NL

SUBJECT: DUTCH NATIONAL CRIME SQUAD DISMANTLES MAJOR INTERNATIONAL
PEOPLE TRAFFICKING NETWORK

¶1. An investigation by the National Crime Squad (NR) led to the arrest of key members of a major international network of Turkish people traffickers on February 6. National TIP prosecutor Warner ten Kate said the successful operation was the result of close cooperation among the national and regional police, the KMar border police, the Labor Ministry Social Information and Investigation Service (SIOD), and German authorities. So far, 12 Turkish suspects have been arrested, seven in Germany and five in the Netherlands. One Dutch suspect was also arrested. Ten Kate said he expects more arrests soon.

¶2. Confirming press reports on the operation, Ten Kate told emboff that the investigation, which began in April 2006, uncovered an international network of people traffickers suspected of having forced women to work as prostitutes. The investigation indicated that the women were physically and mentally abused, exploited, and were completely dependent on their traffickers. Moreover, they were watched by bodyguards. The women reportedly were forced to work in licensed brothels in Amsterdam, Alkmaar and Utrecht. The Crime Squad has so far identified some 90 of the gang's victims in the Netherlands, including women of Dutch, Polish, Romanian, German, Bulgarian and Irish nationality. So far, one Lithuanian woman, who has been placed in a shelter, is considering pressing charges. However, Ten Kate emphasized that the victims' pressing charges is not a "must" for the investigation and prosecution to proceed. He noted that police controls in the prostitution areas in Amsterdam, Alkmaar and Utrecht have been stepped up. Over the next few months, prostitutes will be actively approached by the police and will be offered shelter. The investigation will continue. Press reports indicated that the police used extensive wiretaps and surveillance in the investigation; many of the victims were reluctant to come forward to file reports against the traffickers.

¶3. The arrests reportedly were triggered when some of the suspects apparently realized they were being investigated, and attempted to flee to Turkey via Germany. Dutch police surveillance and arrest teams pursued the suspects, who were intercepted near Cologne in cooperation with German police. Raids on houses in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities resulted in the arrest of other members of the network. The Turkish organization is also suspected of money laundering. The traffickers reportedly own valuable real estate in Germany and Turkey. The NR has sent special investigators to Turkey to try to seize the traffickers' assets in close cooperation with Turkish authorities.

¶4. Comment. The investigation that led to the February 6 arrests

is the single largest anti-TIP investigation carried out so far in the Netherlands. The take-down of an extensive transnational people-trafficking network indicates that the Justice Ministry's focus on TIP as a national law enforcement priority is paying off.

Arnall